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SUBJECT: DRUG TRAFFICKING IN ETHIOPIA

REF: STATE 105731

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ethiopia has become increasingly popular as a transit point along narco-trafficking routes as a result of convenient air service, limited law enforcement, and minimal criminal penalties. Heroin is the most commonly trafficked substance, followed by cannabis and cocaine. Most international traffickers convicted in 2009 were of East African origin; nearly half were Tanzanian citizens. Cannabis has traditionally been grown in Ethiopia and is commonly sent via the postal service to the UK and, to a lesser extent, other countries. Ethiopia has not experienced significant security or public health problems to date as a result of increased narco-trafficking, but police are wary of this growing phenomenon. Communication between post and law enforcement authorities is good, but cooperative programming is limited. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) According to Tsegaye Gebrehiwot, Counter Narcotics Chief at the Ethiopian Federal Police Commission, international narco-trafficking has become an increasingly serious problem in Ethiopia over the past two years. While Ethiopia is not a significant source or destination country for illegal drugs, the combination of convenient and affordable air service on Ethiopian Airlines, limited police capacity to combat narco-trafficking, and minimal prison sentences for convicted drug traffickers have led many traffickers to utilize Addis Ababa as a transit point. Tsegaye told PolOff that in his career as a law enforcement officer, Ethiopia had not experienced anywhere near the volume of narco-trafficking that it is currently experiencing. He attributed the increase primarily to improved pan-African air service on Ethiopian Airlines, and noted that the Government of Ethiopia's (GoE) failure to improve drug enforcement efforts and update its criminal code (which provides for less than two years prison time for most narcotics convictions) had allowed the problem to grow unchecked.

¶3. (SBU) Tsegaye noted that his unit has stepped up drug enforcement operations at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, and provided statistics on drug seizures for 2009. Since January, police have arrested 16 narco-traffickers (seven Tanzanian, two each from Uganda, South African, and the UK, and one each from Ethiopia, Belgium, and Guinea). Of these seizures, the most commonly trafficked substance was heroin (9 cases), followed by cannabis (4 cases) and cocaine (2 cases). In one case where the substance was not identified, post's RSO and LEGATT are working to provide technical assistance to the Ethiopian authorities. Tanzania, India, and UAE were most commonly identified as source or destination countries. Ethiopia was a source country in four cases, three of which involved the trafficking of

locally-grown cannabis to Europe. Specific trafficking routes for each case are noted below:

Origin	Destination
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Tanzania	China
China	Tanzania
UAE	Tanzania
DRC	Belgium
India	Uganda
UAE	Tanzania
South Africa	Thailand
India	DRC
UAE	Rwanda
Ethiopia	UK
UAE	Tanzania
India	DRC
Ethiopia	Germany
Ethiopia	UK
India	Kenya
China, India, Ethiopia	Mali, Thailand

¶4. (SBU) Drug production within Ethiopia is primarily confined to cannabis grown around the Rastafarian community at Shashemene. While some cannabis is trafficked by air, the vast majority is sent through the Ethiopian postal service. Tsegaye noted that his unit had also stepped up enforcement efforts in conjunction with the postal service, and provided specific data on 44 seizures of cannabis from mailed packages. Of these, 37 were mailed to the UK. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) office in

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Cairo, which covers Ethiopia, there is also limited poppy production in Ethiopia.

¶5. (SBU) Communication between post and DEA regional office and Ethiopian law enforcement authorities concerning narco-trafficking is good, and the USG has provided various forms of counter narcotics assistance to the GoE in the past. Currently, cooperative activities are limited to DEA training. Ethiopia did not receive INL funding in FY 2009, but is scheduled to receive funding in FY 2010.

¶6. (SBU) Tsegaye reported that while some narco-traffickers may have established safe houses in Addis Ababa, the use of Ethiopia as a transit hub has not had a great impact on security. However, he expressed a growing wariness that if left unchecked, Ethiopia's reputation as a safe haven for traffickers could have a severe impact on security in Addis Ababa and at Bole International Airport. At present, post has not observed any impact on security, good governance, or public health as a result of this new trafficking pattern.
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